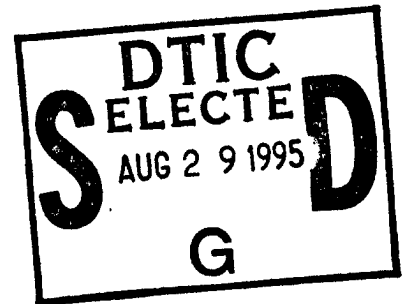NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

THE FOURTH ARAB-ISRAELI WAR:
A CLAUSEWITZIAN VICTORY FOR EGYPT IN
SEVENTY-THREE?

by

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LIEUTENANT COLONEL, U.S. ARMY

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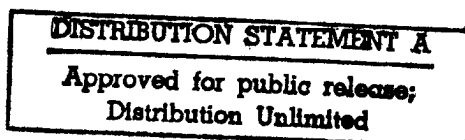
A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by either the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _C. F. Doroski_

16 May 1995

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ABSTRACT OF

THE FOURTH ARAB-ISRAELI WAR: A CLAUSEWITZIAN VICTORY FOR EGYPT IN SEVENTY-THREE?

The role that the military plays in the achievement of a
nation's political objectives through the limited, judicious use
of force is examined through the analysis of the 1973 Arab-
Israeli War. Once again the Arabs, in particular Egypt, found
themselves in an untenable (No Peace -- No War) predicament with
Israel. Strategic and operational level deception plus
operational level maneuver will be analysed to highlight how,
through their proper use, a lesser regarded opponent can start
and conduct a short, limited, low risk war while achieving gains
to the hundredth magnitude. Any country, but specifically
Western countries, can learn much from this war. Western
democracies must learn that winning militarily is no longer
enough. War, being just a portion of a nation's political will,
must be acknowledged as only truly being won when won on the
political level. From this, lessons learned range from the need
to overcome the obsequious infirmity of human decision-making at
the head of state level to great successes made possible through
high speed operational level maneuver.

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"...war is nothing but the continuation of policy
with other means."[1] Carl von Clausewitz

INTRODUCTION

To overcome three successive military defeats at the hands
of the Israelis, the Egyptians were forced to combine operational
maneuver with deception, a combination which contributed to the
achievement of their objectives during the Fourth Arab-Israeli
War, the War of Ramadan. Western operational planners need to
understand the Egyptians' success so that, as planners, we can
factually assess military powers of third-world countries, better
plan to defend against and defeat these forces if required and
hope to eliminate our perceptions of Arab weaknesses. In the War
of Ramadan, failure to accomplish these caused unnecessary battle
losses and the near defeat of Israel. Of significance, this war
was viewed by the Arabs strictly as a means of last resort.

As the newly elected president of the Arab Republic of
Egypt, Mohammed Anwar el Sadat knew that his country had only two
options available in order to break the political stalemate

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[1] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Edited and translated by
Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1984), p. 69.

between Egypt and Israel and thus achieve Egypt's end state: to continue in its costly battle of attrition against Israel (No Peace -- No War Alternative) or to prepare for some limited type of offensive, conventional war. In the book, The Ramadan War,1973, written by three Egyptian General Officers who were in the Egyptian high command at the time, we are told: "President Sadat selected the second alternative and accordingly issued to his minister of war this political aim: 'to prepare the armed forces to secure the land in an offensive operation which would break the political stalemate.'"[2] His Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief, General Ahmed Ismail, then translated this political aim into a military mission, Operation Badr, by declaring the military mission "to undertake a limited offensive, to establish a bridgehead [on the east bank] across the Suez Canal."[3]

As in life, many different paths can lead to success. Clausewitz wrote: "...the destruction of the enemy's forces, the conquest of his territory, to a temporary occupation or invasion, to projects with an immediate political purpose..." can all lead to success.[4] The Egyptians, starting with deception, brought this Clausewitzian theory to life to achieve their national end state of ending the No Peace -- No War situation, regaining

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[2] Hassan el Badri and others, The Ramadan War, 1973 (Dunn Loring: T.N. Dupuy Associates, Inc., 1978), p. 17.

[3] Ibid., p. 19.

[4] Clausewitz, p. 94.

territory occupied by Israel since 1967 and combating the
Israelis, thus, regaining lost Arab honor (SEE FIGURE #1).

DECEPTION

First, two brief definitions. According to <u>Joint Publication 3-0, Doctrine For Joint Operations</u>, strategic military deception is defined as: "military deception that targets foreign national security policy objectives, courses of action, and military strategies for the overall conduct of military campaigns as employed by heads of state and national high commands."[5] Operational military deception is defined as: "military deception that targets the opposing commander's preparations and intentions for using military force to accomplish defensive or offensive operational missions at the theater level and below. Operational military deception is employed by theater, subtheater, and joint task force (JTF) commanders in the operational chain of command."[6]

Deception can be divided into the following three phases: strategic surprise, pre-hostilities planning and operational deception. In Egypt's case, President Sadat was primarily responsible for Egyptian strategic surprise. A thorough planner, he was able to decoy both the Israeli and U.S. governments by the following actions: maintaining a continuous peace initiative; using massive Soviet manpower and equipment to upgrade his forces and then expelling the Soviets while retaining their backing;

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[5] U.S. Department of Defense, <u>JCS Pub 3-0, Doctrine For Joint Operations</u> (Washington, D.C.: 1993), p. GL-11.

[6] Ibid.

maintaining a political and military sense of normalcy; obtaining

financial aid from Saudi Arabia and finally, obtaining the last

and most important requirement, a surface-to-surface missile that

could, in retaliation, be used against any targets inside of

Israel proper.[7] President Sadat's decision to attack on the

tenth day of Ramadan, an Islamic thirty day fasting period, which

coincided with Yom Kippur, an extremely holy Jewish religious

observance, was brilliant. This decision, along with the U.S.

government's misinterpretation of Soviet adaptability concerning

superpower detente, the world-wide oil situation, overconfidence

in Allied interests, and with Israel's current status of being

strong militarily but confused politically, made victims of both

Israel and the Unites States.[8]

The pre-hostilities and operational deception planning, on

the other hand, was in the domain of General Ismail, whose first

step was to analyze Israeli strengths and weaknesses. General

Ismail concluded that Israeli strengths were:

> ...air superiority, technical ability, a high standard
> of training and what he [General Ismail] considered to
> be guaranteed supplies from the United States. Against
> this he considered that Israel suffered from a number
> of basic disadvantages: long lines of communications
> leading to a number of fronts, an inability to suffer
> heavy casualties because of its small population or to
> fight a long war because of ı basic economic weakness;

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[7] Kathryn A. MacKinney, Egypt and Israel: The Intelligence Prelude to the October War of 1973 (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence School, 1970), pp. 2-6.

[8] Harvey Sicherman, The Yom Kippur War: End of Illusion? (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976), p. 38.

coupled with these were the disadvantages arising out
of over-confidence and a superiority complex.[9]

After clearly defining, documenting and thoroughly understanding
these Israeli strengths and weaknesses, the Egyptians undertook
several steps. They established a combined command between Egypt
and Syria, cut down Israeli warning time, conducted commando and
conventional maneuvers in the Canal Zone day and night and
executed Exercise Liberation 23, which turned into Operation
Badr.[10]

These actions proved extremely successful, as the subsequent
errors in Israeli judgment show. The Israelis' mobilized their
forces in May, 1973, at a high financial cost. They strongly
believed they were in no immediate danger of an Arab attack
because of the lack of traditional signs of civilian and military
mobilization and saw no diplomatic indications of a potential
Egyptian war effort.[11] Also, the Israelis felt the Bar-Lev Line,
a series of in-depth fortifications manned by mobile forces on
the west bank of the Canal, would sufficiently repulse or
severely hinder any Egyptian attack to the Sinai (SEE FIGURE #2).
An Israeli Major General at the time, Chaim Herzog promoted this
faulty Israeli assumption, on which he later commented: "They
[the Egyptians] saw in its [the Bar-Lev Line] construction the
creation of a permanent, impregnable Israeli presence which would

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[9] Chaim Herzog, The War of Atonement, October, 1973
(Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), p. 28.

[10] MacKinney, pp. 3-6.

[11] Ibid., p. 8.

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only perpetuate the status quo and limit drastically the

prospects of changing the situation along the Canal."[12]

This faulty thinking was confirmed by none other then

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, merely two months prior to

the war starting, when he stated:

> The overall balance of our forces is in our favor. Our
> military superiority is the dual outcome of Arab
> weakness and our strength. Their weakness stems from
> factors that will not change soon...low level of their
> soldiers education, technology, integrity...disunion
> among Arabs...and the decisive weight of extreme
> nationalism [the latter being an Israeli strength].[13]

Carl von Clausewitz adds:

> As regards surprise and initiative,...they are
> infinitely more important and effective in strategy
> than in tactics. Tactical initiative can rarely be
> expanded into a major victory, but a strategic one has
> often brought the whole war to an end at a stroke. On
> the other hand, the use of this device assumes major,
> decisive, and exceptional mistakes on the enemy's part.
> Consequently it will not do much to tip the scales in
> the favor of attack.[14]

Without doubt, President Sadat's use of "surprise and initiative"

(deception) and the "major, decisive and exceptional mistakes"

made by the Israeli national leadership did indeed "tip the

scales in the favor of [the Egyptian] attack."

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[12] Herzog, p. 8.

[13] Edgar O'Ballance, No Victor, No Vanquished: The Yom
Kippur War (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978), p. 51.

[14] Clausewitz, pp. 363-364.

OPERATIONAL MANEUVER

Maneuver at the operational level of warfare is defined by the U.S. Army in Field Manual 100-5 Operations as: "...the means by which the commander determines where and when to fight by setting the terms of battle, declining battle, or acting to take advantage of tactical actions. Maneuver is dynamic warfare that rejects predictable patterns of operations."[15]

Although there is considerable disagreement among politicians, military officers and concerned observers on the Egyptian Army's successful use of operational maneuver throughout the War of Ramadan, two facts must be noted. One, Egypt was successful in meeting its limited, conventional war objective on Day Three (October 8th) by breaching the Bar-Lev Line and establishing a defensive perimeter. Two, Egypt repelled a major armor counterattack (SEE FIGURE #3). Addressing this counterattack, even with the benefit of over twenty years of hindsight to make its results more politically palatable, Israeli Lieutenant Colonel Eshel writes: "The Arab-Israeli War of 1973 was about 40 hours old, as Major General "Bren" Adan's 162d Armored Division started its ill-fated counterattack on the morning of 8 October 1973. The Egyptian Army had, in those 40 hours, achieved tremendous feats of arms. The shock effect...was

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[15] U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5 Operations (Washington, D.C.: 1993), p. 2-5.

devastating."[16] The Egyptian infantry simply destroyed the Israeli, tank heavy, counterattack. However, unlike this well rehearsed, pre-planned defense, the Egyptian offense to gain territory on Day Eight (October 14th) was a hasty, ill-planned operation and initiated only because "urgent requests were sent from Damascus to Cairo for offensive action by the Egyptian Forces."[17] This limited Egyptian offense, forced on General Ismail by President Sadat, was soundly defeated (SEE FIGURE #4). British Major General A.H. Farrar-Hockley, in The Arab-Israeli War, October 1973, points out: "General Ismail cannot have been happy to have had his professional judgement so effectively vindicated at such a cost."[18] Farrar-Hockley added, "In either case, it is clear that he discountenanced any operation which involved movement beyond his air defenses."[19] If President Sadat, at the urgent request of President Assad of Syria, had not forced the Egyptian units to attack, but had allowed them to keep to the pre-hostilities planning, the Egyptian forces would not have suffered this disabling defeat.

When attacking across the Canal, however, the Egyptians made impeccable use of operational maneuver. The attack was a

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[16] David Eshel, "Counterattack in the Sinai: 8 October 1973," Military Review, November 1993, p. 55.

[17] Elizebeth Monroe and A.H. Farrar-Hockley, The Arab-Israeli War, October 1973: Background and Events (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1975), p. 27.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 26.

complete surprise and, as pointed out by Major General Palit, a

member of the Indian Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis,

> An attack across a water obstacle against an enemy
> holding prepared fortifications on the other side is
> one of the most difficult and complicated military
> operations: and the Egyptians were undertaking not a
> normal river crossing attack but a multi-pronged
> offensive requiring crossing operations at a number of
> points over nearly 100 kilometers of defended front.
> Only those who have planned or executed such an
> operation can fully appreciate the hazards it
> entails.[20]

The Egyptians attacked simultaneously with their Second and Third

Armies abreast, crossed the Canal, reinforced their units and

achieved their bridgehead as planned. After destroying over 140

tanks during the Israeli counterattack, "...the Egyptian ground

and air forces had successfully surprised and broken the Bar-Lev

Line." By any standards, it was a tour de force.[21]

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[20] D.K. Palit, Return to Sinai: The Arab Offensive, October 1973 (New Delhi: Palit and Palit Publishing, 1974), p. 63.

[21] Monroe and Farrar-Hockley, p. 22.

CONCLUSION

The fighting finally stopped on the Suez. On the strategic level, the Egyptians, through President Sadat's infamous use of surprise and deception, out maneuvered and decoyed both Israel and the United States. While, at the operational level, Egyptian Commander-in-Chief Ismail's pre-hostilities and deception planning turned the limited offense, Operation Badr, into a success by fully exploiting the Israeli disadvantages of long lines of communications, highest concern for limiting casualties, military over-confidence and a highly exaggerated superiority complex.

Arab States, plus most of the world's diplomatic if not military corps, acknowledge that President Sadat, by starting and fighting a war of less than three weeks duration, achieved his political end state through use of this limited war. President Sadat ended the No Peace - No War condition, regained lost territory both militarily and through negotiations and regained lost Arab honor by engaging in mortal combat with his life's nemesis, the Israelis (SEE FIGURE #5). Israel, ultimately, won the fighting war but lost at peace. Although Israel did retain the State of Israel and established an airtight tie with the United States, Israel lost both territory and the aura of Israeli superiority and overall indivisibility.

On the political level, Egypt won the war in a decisive manner thereby earning the respect and equality from the West it

so strongly desired. Israel, as a democracy, though fighting for its very survival, learned that trying to fight an unlimited, total war as a limited, political war is a lot like having a root canal. It makes perfect sense when you discuss it dispassionately with your dentist but once the actual procedure begins, it can become a long, drawnout, messy affair with the results remaining unknown even after the direct action stops.

A reasonable argument has been presented regarding an Egyptian victory in the Fourth Arab-Israeli War. Israel may have won the military statistics war but Egypt clearly won the Clausewitzian political war (SEE FIGURE #6). The most succinct summary of my thesis was presented by famed historian and writer Trevor N. Dupuy when he wrote:

> Thus, if war is the employment of military force in support of political objectives, there can be no doubt that in strategic and political terms the Arab States—and particularly Egypt—won the war, even though the military outcome was a stalemate permitting both sides to claim military victory.[22]

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[22] Trevor N. Dupuy, Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars, 1947-1974 (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 603.

LESSONS LEARNED

After describing the Egyptian's highly successful use of operational maneuver and deception to achieve their end state in the War of Ramadan, several principles of warfare can be identified for western military planners.

First, there is the need for factual, current and timely intelligence about the enemy. Once that is obtained, planners must ensure that a complete and continuous interpretation process takes place. The number one subset is the abject frailty of the human decision making. In today's world of instant communications and unimaginable weapon lethality, national leaders can little afford to make strategic miscalculations. As planners, we cannot allow either faulty or preconceived notions concerning Arabs and their cultures to overshadow good intelligence. Also, we must remember that not only could this type of conflict happen again but that it also could have been prevented.

Second, we must continually and realistically prepare and train our intelligence and combat forces. If we are surprised by an enemy force, we must be able to conduct the necessary, aggressive military operations to recover and defeat the enemy. My personal all-time #1 lesson learned fits here as: he who loses the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Battle loses the war. The Israelis lost this battle and suffered a near defeat because of it.

Third, we must never allow either wanton conceit about our
capabilities or wanton contempt of our enemy's capabilities to
govern our thoughts, plans or actions. Only crystal clear,
irrefutable and achievable war aims fully explained prior to the
start of hostilities will prevent the loss of the people's
support, attenuate the destruction of the will to fight and allow
for victory in a limited, less than total war.

FIGURE #1 (ISRAELI OCCUPIED TERRITORIES; JUNE 1967)

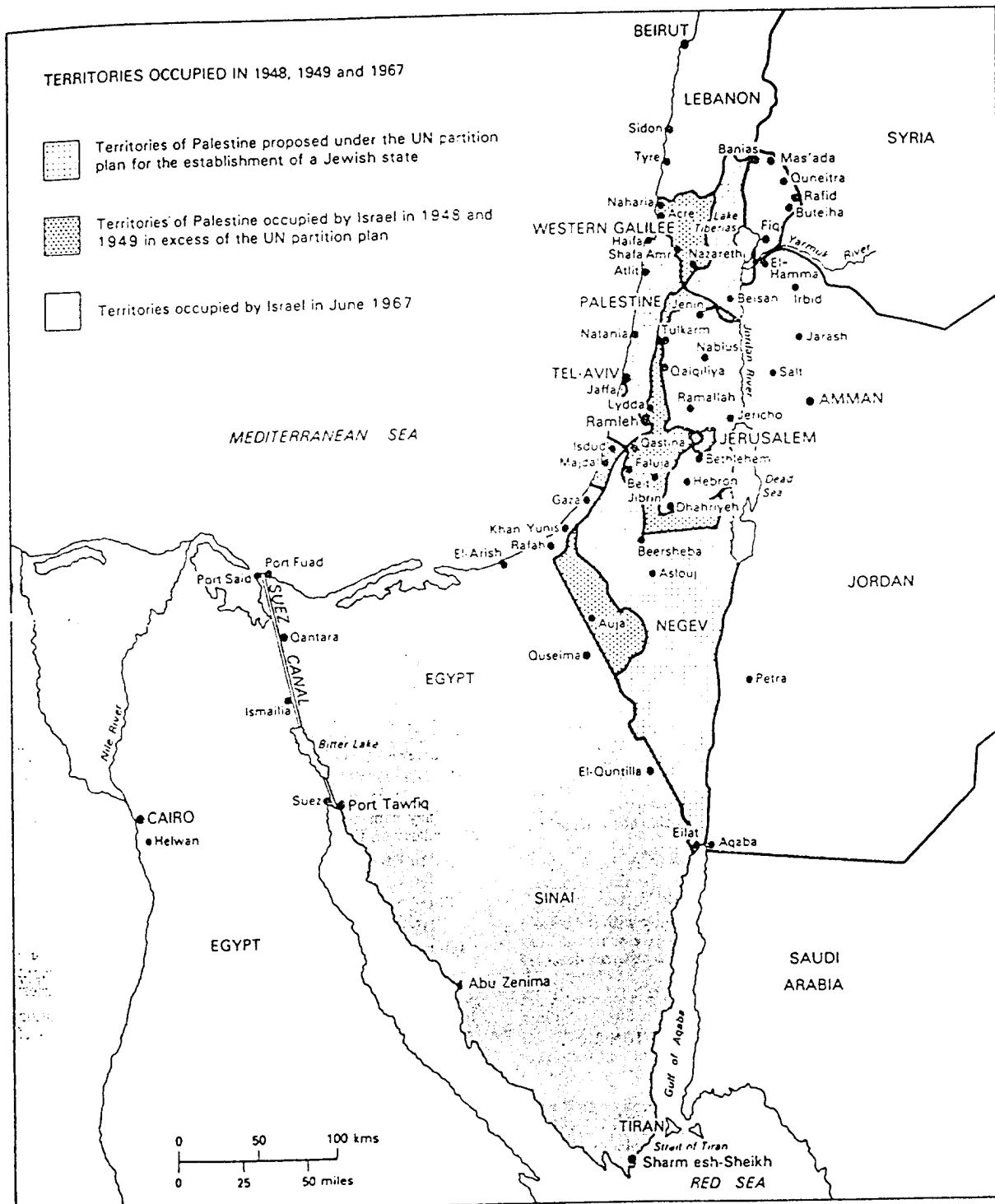The Middle East and North Africa 1993, 39th ed., (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1993), p. 79.

TERRITORIES OCCUPIED IN 1948, 1949 and 1967

Territories of Palestine proposed under the UN partition plan for the establishment of a Jewish state

Territories of Palestine occupied by Israel in 1948 and 1949 in excess of the UN partition plan

Territories occupied by Israel in June 1967

FIGURE #2 (THE SUEZ CANAL FRONT)

Elizabeth Monroe and A.H. Farrar-Hockley, <u>The Arab-Israeli War, October 1973: Background and Events</u> (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1975), p. 21.
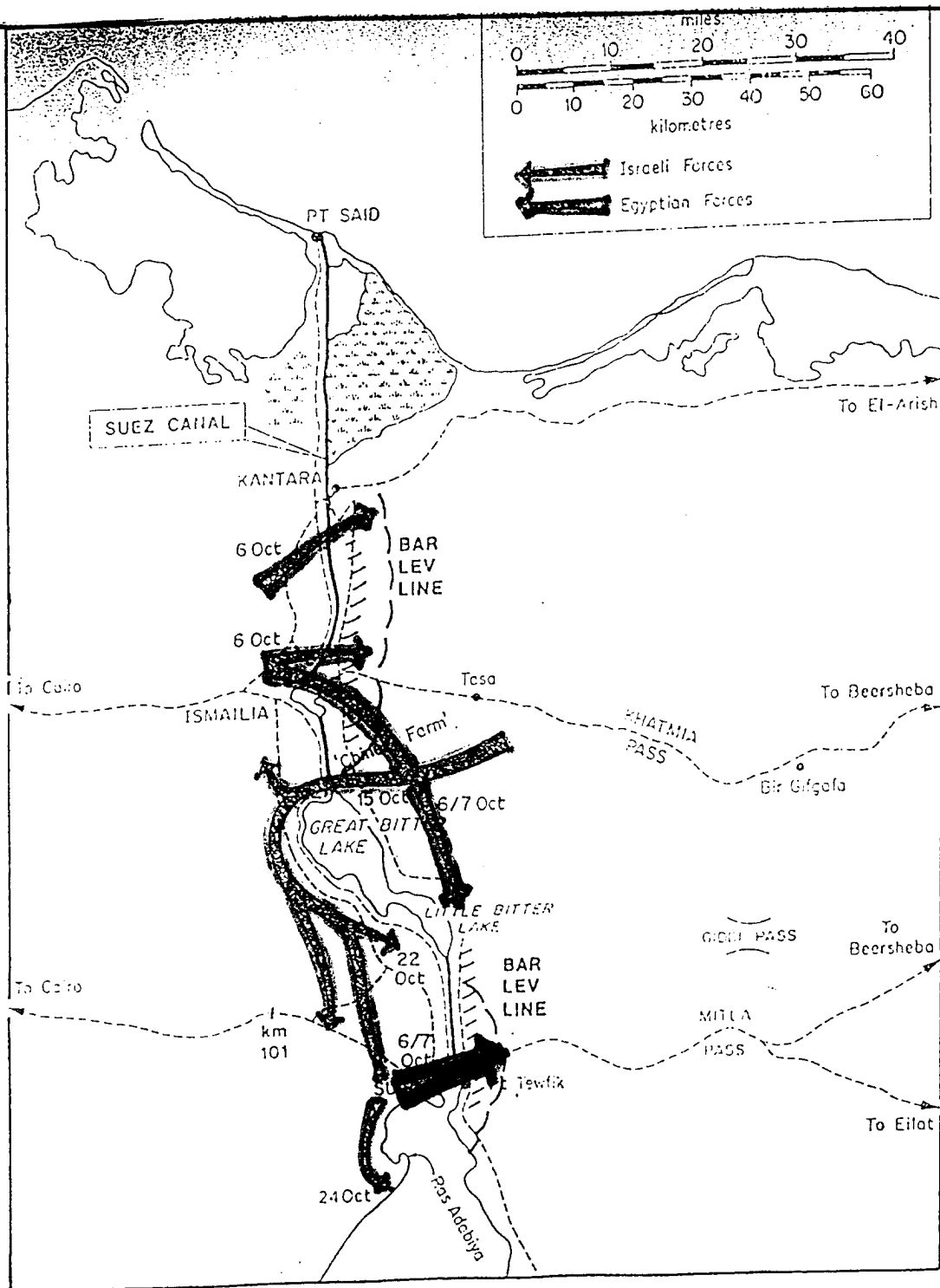
FIGURE #3   (CAMPAIGN IN SINAI; 6-13 OCTOBER 1973)

Thomas E. Griess, ed., <u>The Arab-Israeli Wars, The Chinese Civil War, and The Korean War</u>. (Wayne: Avery Publishing Group, Inc., 1987), p. 12.

FIGURE #4   (CAMPAIGN IN SINAI; 14-15 OCTOBER 1973)

Thomas E. Griess, ed., The Arab-Israeli Wars, The Chinese Civil War, and the Korean War (Wayne: Avery Publishing Group, Inc., 1987), p.12.
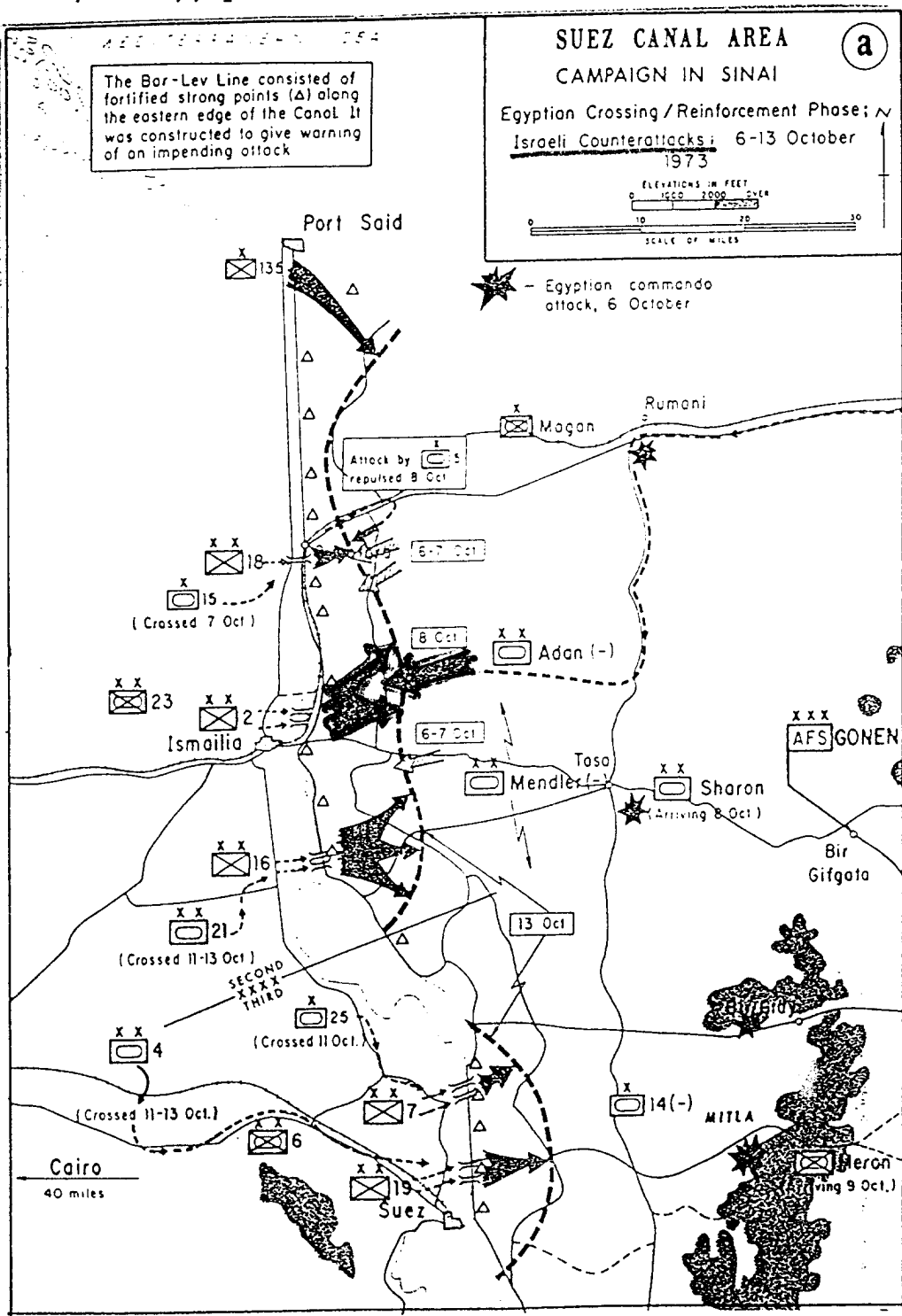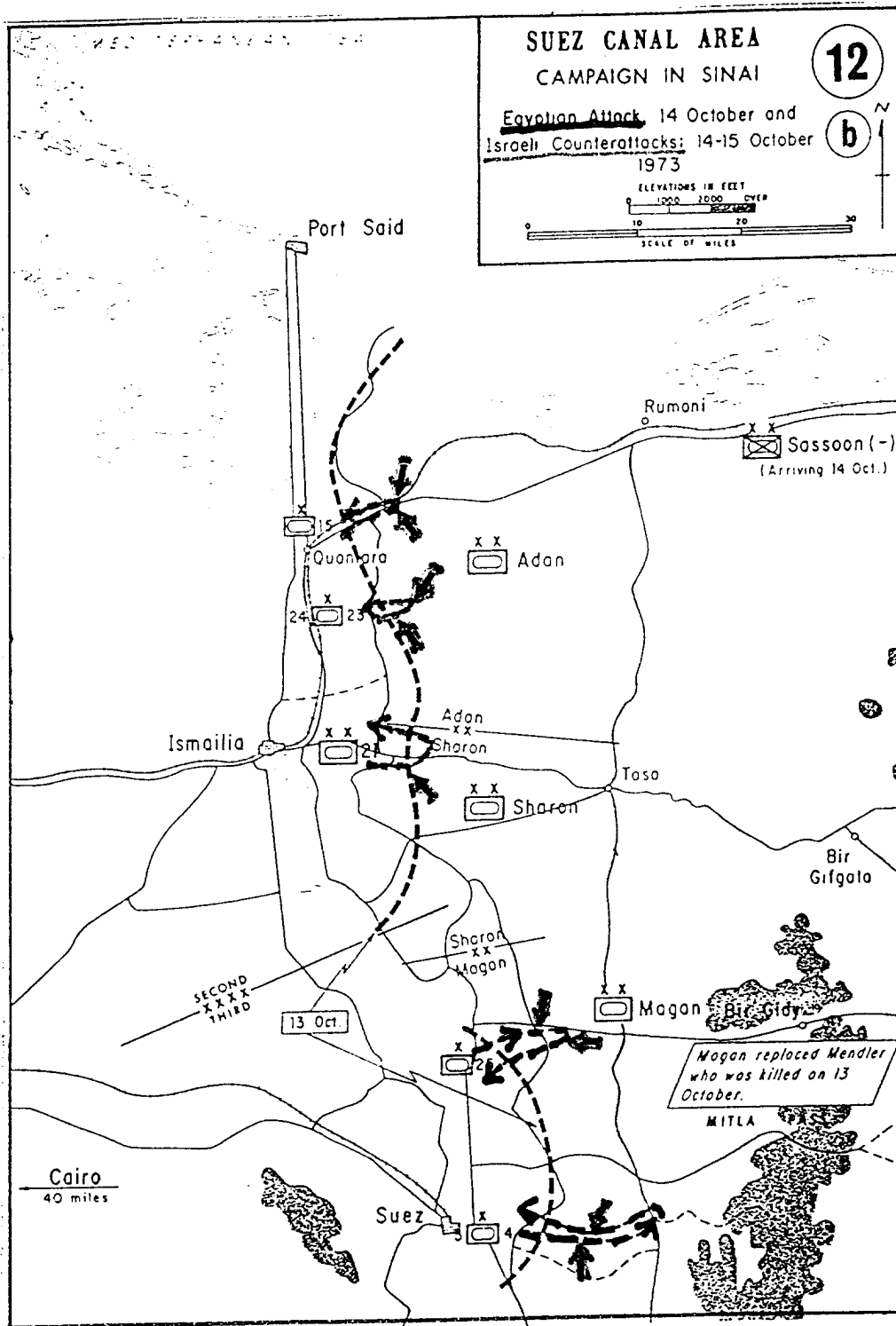

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FIGURE #5   (ISRAELI/EGYPTIAN DISENGAGEMENT; 18 JANUARY 1974)

<u>The Middle East and North Africa 1993</u>, 39th ed., (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1993), p. 81.
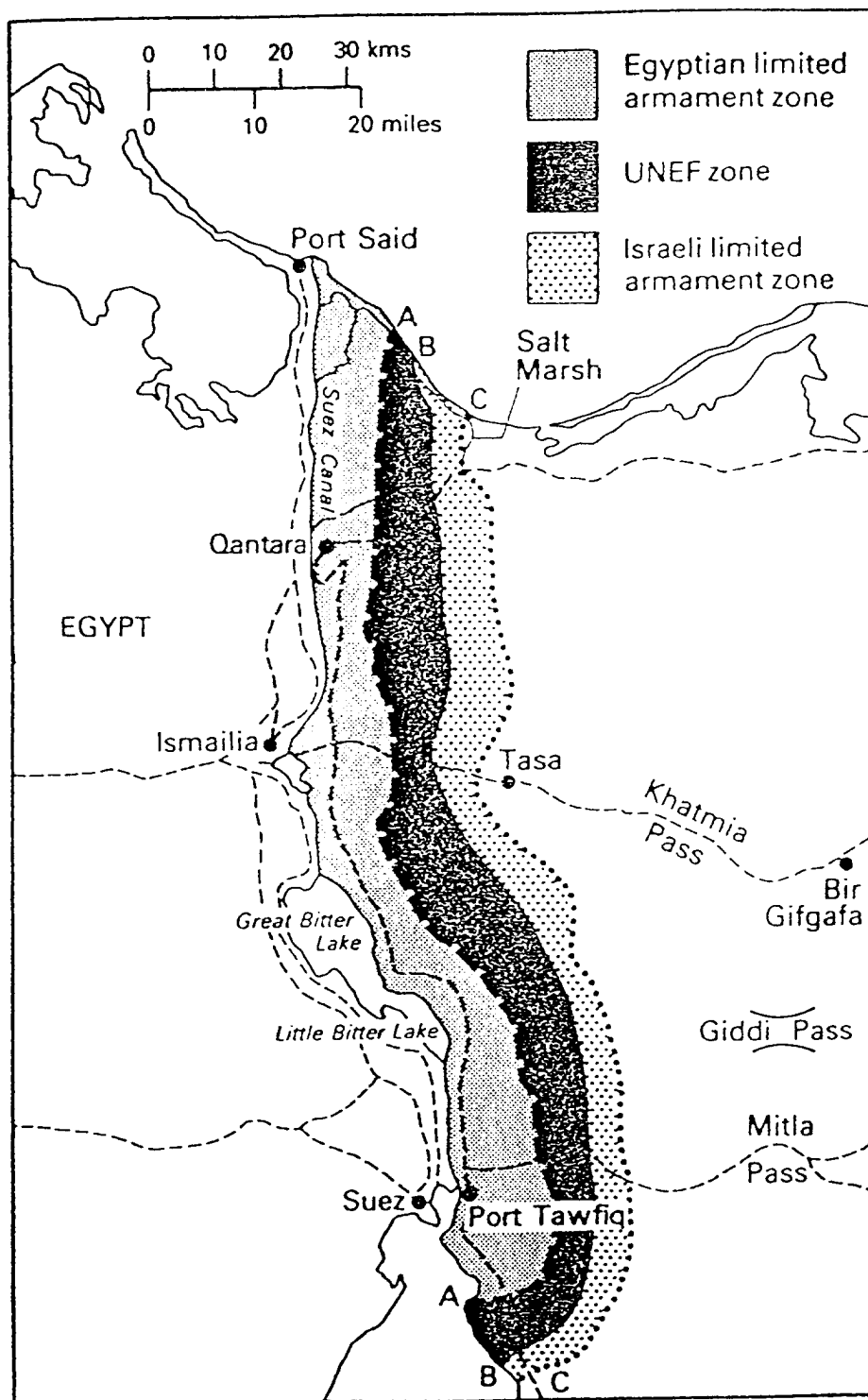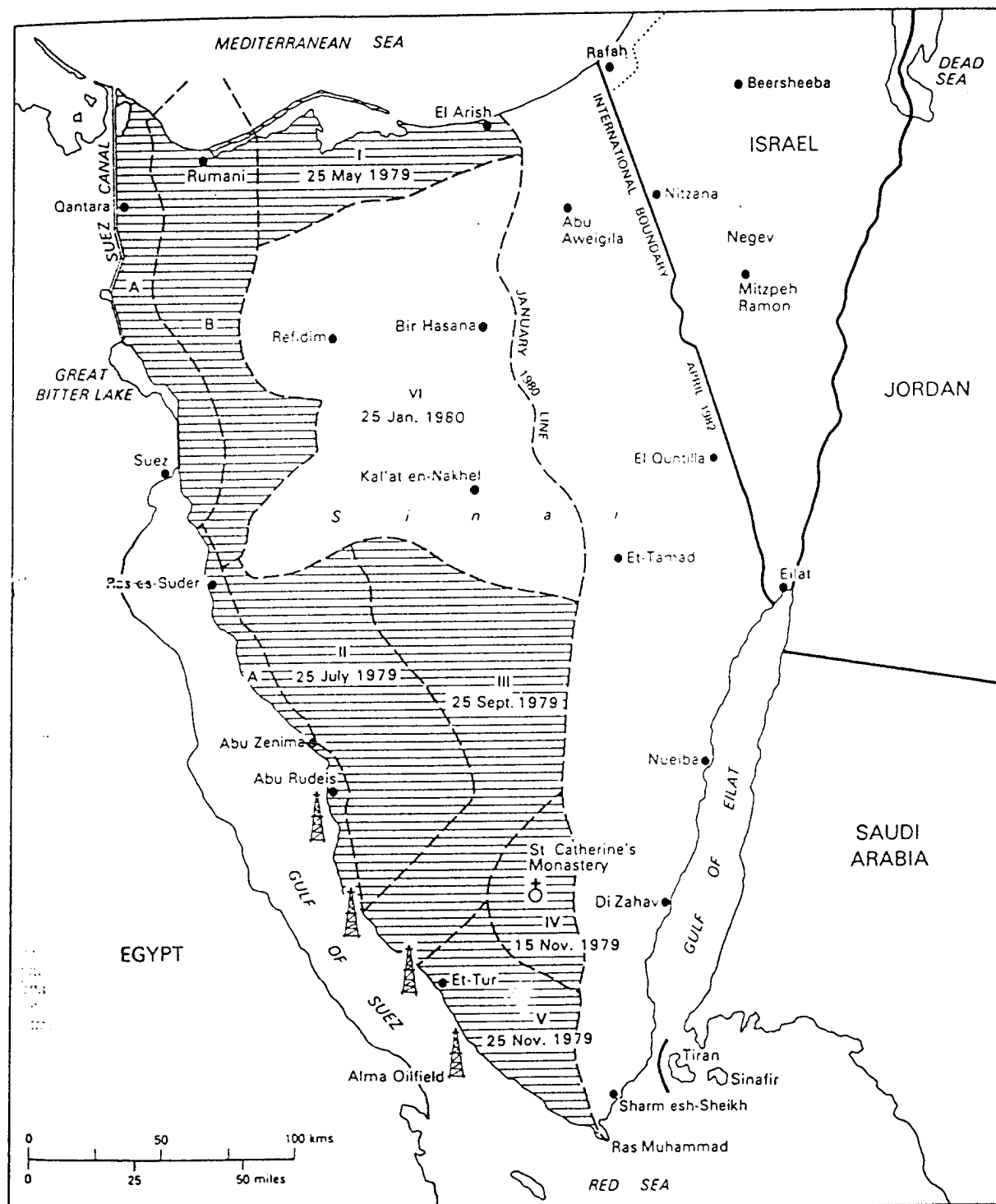
FIGURE #6 (ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM SINAI; 1974-1982)

<u>The Middle East and North Africa 1993</u>, 39th ed., (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1993), p. 93.

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